Managing Symptoms of Colds and Flu

- **Steam** can be used one to four times a day for 15 minutes.

- **Warm compresses or gel masks** can be placed on the face to relieve pain as often as needed.

- **Nasal saline sprays**: These sprays can help wash away thickened mucus and soothe dry, irritated sinuses. Use one to four times a day. Wipe the tip of the container with an alcohol swab before and after use. Some examples of nasal saline sprays are Ayr, Little Noses (for children), Ocean and Simply Saline. Saline sprays in aerosol cans (like Simply Saline) are the most hygienic.

- **Sinus irrigation (NeilMed Sinus Rinse/Neti pot)**: These saline washes can be more effective at clearing out the sinuses. Use one to two times a day. Keep the equipment clean to prevent further infection. Use distilled, boiled or bottled water, not tap water. One irrigation packet or 1 teaspoon of salt with or without ½ teaspoon of baking soda per 8 ounces of water (baking soda may be less irritating for some people).

- **Expectorants (mucus thinners)**: These medications help loosen and thin mucus so that it drains more easily. They are extremely safe, rarely cause side effects, have almost no drug interactions with other medicines and can be taken with any medical condition. Guaifenesin is included in over-the-counter products such as Mucinex (12-hour tablets), Mucus Relief (four- to eight-hour tablets), Robitussin (liquid) or Robitussin DM (if you also have a cough). You may take up to 2,400 milligrams a day.

- **Decongestants (taken by mouth)**: These help unblock the nose and sinuses and allow mucus to drain. If you have high blood pressure, heart or cardiovascular problems, use these medications with care. Decongestants can be used occasionally if these problems are well-controlled, but you should consult your doctor before using them. Pseudoephedrine is the most effective decongestant. It is available without a prescription but can only be obtained through a pharmacist. You may take up to 240 milligrams a day. Phenylephrine (Sudafed PE) is a less effective ingredient. This medication can be short-acting or long-acting. The maximum dose is 60 milligrams a day.

- **Prescription (cortisone) nasal sprays**: These usually do not provide immediate relief, but are meant for use over long periods of time to prevent or lessen the severity of infections. You can use these sprays regularly between, during and after infections and at the first sign of symptoms. If you are using a cortisone spray regularly, your doctor may recommend increasing your usual dose as soon as symptoms worsen. Although these sprays contain cortisone, the cortisone is limited to the nose and does not spread to the rest of the body.

- **Nasal spray decongestants**: These sprays unblock the nose almost immediately and can help relieve sinus congestion. They should be used only for significant discomfort and then followed by nasal cortisone sprays. Do not use nasal spray decongestants if they burn or sting. **Do not use these nasal sprays for more than three days** as they can cause nasal damage over time. Oxymetazoline (Afrin) and phenylephrine (Neosynephrine) are the two types of sprays available. Oxymetazoline is the stronger medication of the two.

- **Pain relievers**: Acetaminophen (Tylenol), ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin), or naproxen (Aleve) can be taken in addition to the above measures if needed and approved by your doctor.

- ** Antibiotics** are **not** recommended unless your symptoms last more than 7 to 10 days, if you have three days of severe symptoms, fever over 102 F, or worsening symptoms after first improving with the above therapies.